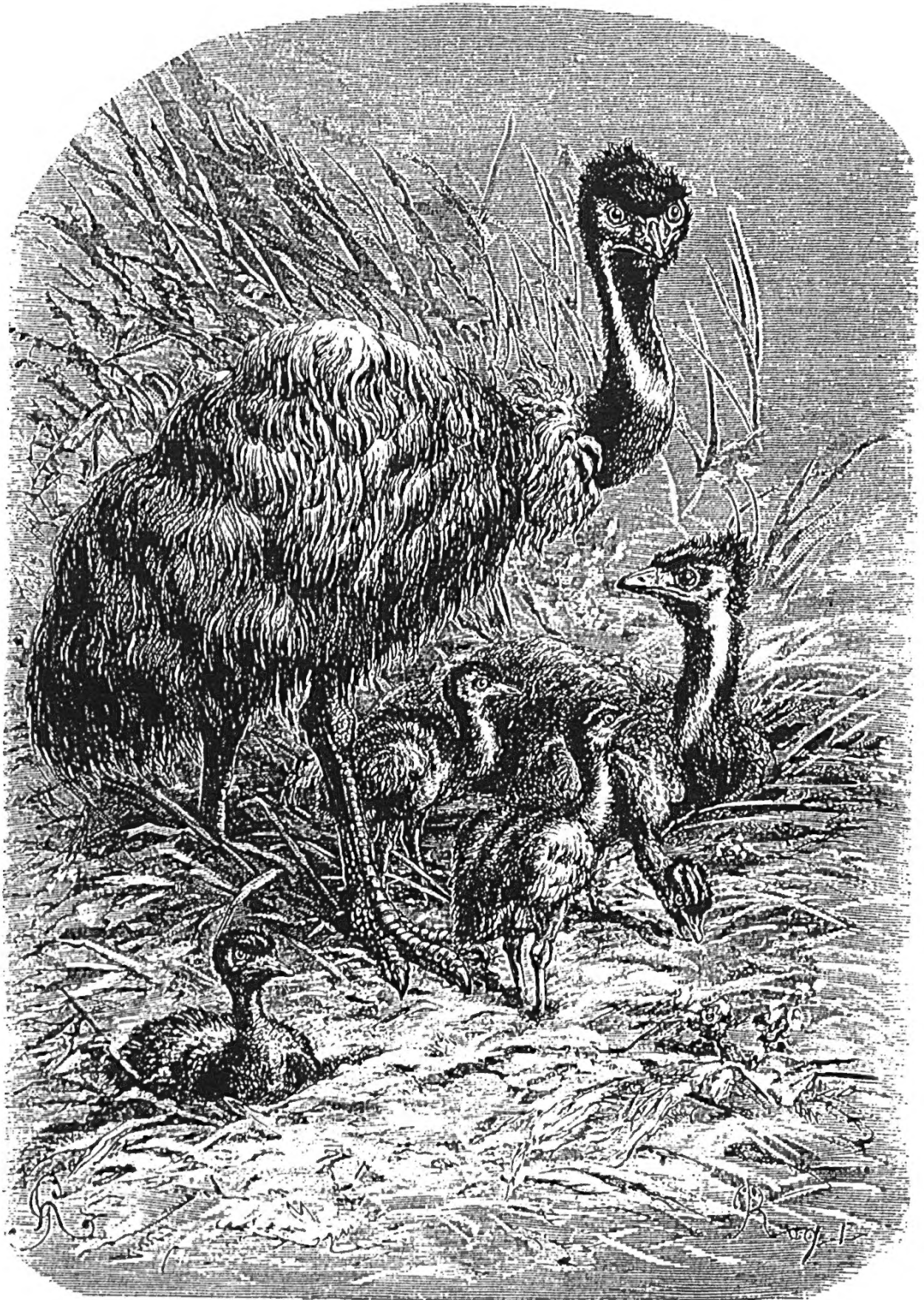


Field Naturalists' Club of Ballarat *Inc* April 2001



THE EMEU.

DIARY DATES

Fri 6th April. Meeting - *What Rock is That?* Speaker Carol Hall, club member.

Sun 8th April. Excursion - *Rock Around Ballarat.* Learmonth maar, glacial till, granite mountain an exotic volcano and much more. Approx 150km round trip. Leader Carol Hall.

Wed 10th April - and every Wed. *John Endacott's Environment Show.* 10pm, 99.9 Voice FM, (write to the station if you want a time change).

Tues 24th April. *Mt Erip - A booklet site - and Happy Valley Crossing over Woody Yalloak.* Leader John Gregurke. 9.30 am

Tues 24th April. Committee Meeting, John Gregurkes, 1 John St, Wendouree, 7.30pm.

Fri 4th May. *Phytophthora, Cinnamon Fungus, recovery after dieback.* Speaker Gretna Weste.

Sat 5th May. *Brisbane Ranges, recovery after dieback.* Leader Gretna Weste.

CLUB FEES NOW DUE

Ordinary Member (Adult) \$18, Family \$30, Distant Member \$12, Student \$10, Newsletter Postage (Ordinary Member) \$6. Please pay Bob Curtain ASAP.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT FOR BALLARAT FIELD NATURALISTS' CLUB (INC) For the Year 2000 - 2001

Our annual meeting causes us to reflect on the year just past. It gives me pleasure to share my report with you.

Meetings have been well attended by many of our 46 financial members at the SMB Horticultural rooms, cnr Gillies and Gregory Sts, Wendouree, each month except January. First Sunday and "mid month" excursions have also been well patronised. A summary follows:-

March - "The Year That Was" - co-ordinated by Brian Andrews.

Mt Langi Ghiran - Aboriginal Caves with paintings, good bird list, a walk along an old bluestone waterway to view Ararat's water supply device and a walk around Langi Ghiran reservoir. Mid-month was a walk along Yarrowee Creek prior to a public walk we conducted as part of the Heritage Festival. A few members attended the VFNCA campout hosted by Geelong at Ocean Grove.

April. This began on the 2nd with our public walk planned by John Gregurke. The meeting was addressed by Ern Perkins OAM who described how several Castlemaine members conquered the Lake St Clair walk in Tasmania. Jenny Vernon and Carole Haines, Friends of the Ballarat Botanic Gardens led us around the gardens explaining much not previously known. An afternoon

trip went to Winter Swamp.

May. Ken Kraaijeveld told us about his research work and findings about our Lake Wendouree Black swans. Several of our members have been helping with the field work and the Courier published a photo and article intended to reassure the public about procedures. Eileen Anderson, great granddaughter of Lexton pioneers David and Janet Anderson led a fascinating excursion, chiefly historical, but also natural, around Lexton. Margaret Oulton author of "A Valley of the Finest Description" accompanied us, as did local women Vicki gardener and Geraldine Smith to outline local Landcare projects and identify birds. Another excursion saw us climb Mt Beckwith slopes to view the flowering correas. We have a letter from the late Jim Willis who states that Major Mitchell named this mountain after his former military colleague Col. Thomas Sydney Beckwith - now mis-spelt as Mt Beckworth.

June. Martine Paull taught us about fungi and fungimapping - we certainly need better knowledge of mycology. Claire Dalman led Sundays excursion to the old gold mining area around Creswick following an audio-tape and booklet called "Rivers of Gold". Alan Keeble showed us a large ancient volcanic crater with clearlayers of ash or tuff. A few days later Pat and Bill Murphy led us around Lamplough Reservoir and on to the Glenmona Forest to identify some creatures they had previously glimpsed. These were Yellow-footed Antechinus and we had an excellent view as they scampered about an old tree. An Owlet Nightjar obligingly close, completed a great day. Our annual club campout normally held in spring was experimentally shifted to winter - very successfully, on the 16th - 18th June. John Mildren led a most enjoyable, mild weekend trip to Apollo Bay - glow-worms, Satin Bower birds, albatross, giant old forest trees, fresh fish just some of the pleasures. Carol Hall showed excellent slides of her Antarctic trip to those not worn out on Saturday night.

July. Four club members shared the Friday meeting - John Mildren - White Winged Chough Behaviour, John Gregurke - Anglesea, Paul Norquay - Trees, Ken McDonnell - Evolution. Brian and Kevin Andrews led a fungi excursion to the Wombat Forest. A mid-month trip visited the Union Jack Reserve, Mt Buninyong and Mt Warrenheip.

August. Michael Wilson spoke about the Impact of Willows on Stream Ecology. Consequently we have decided to leave our Lal Lal willows where they are. John Gregurke led about twenty members to a sunny beach day at Anglesea - Point Addis and the Mary White Reserve.

September. Graeme Ambrose showed us many specimens to

illustrate his talk about Pests and Diseases of Plants. A combined Ballarat /Creswick trip , led by Adrian Morton found a lovely range of orchids at Dereel - including a patch of white nodding greenhoods. A trip to Surface Point near Ross Creek, Haddon Common and Junipers Rd Reserve (Brown Antechinus found) with lunch at Belinda Taylor's garden home was another good mid-month trip.

October. As was each month, October was busy. Sue Mudford explained the function and organisation of Trust for Nature. Ern and Lesley Perkins led a marvellously prepared Castlemaine Box-Ironbark Forest trip including lunch amongst a thick carpet of native flowers. We were shown a couple of scarlet spider orchids. The following weekend fifteen members travelled to Howlong NSW for a weekend campout ably hosted by Albury/Wodonga Field Nats. Highlights for me were the patch of purple diuris orchids at Bonegilla Grasslands and the Black Tipped Greenhoods (*P. bicolor*), mostly at Walbundrie. The speakers were excellent. Lyndsay Fink led a mid-month trip to view impressive flower spikes on grasstrees burnt last summer.

November. The annual Stella Bedggood Memorial Lecture was addressed by Dr David Welch from Parks Canada, conveniently in Australia for a short period of research work. Due to undue pressure on some fragile parks, people visitation is now being actively discouraged. Elspeth Swan led our excursion to three local native gardens, those of Erica and Tony Nathan at Yendon, Elspeth and Paul's own garden at Mt Egerton and John and Joy Clark's "Lover's Leap" Nursery at Ballark. Twenty four people enjoyed a lovely day. Mid-month was a tree and grass planting day, aiding LINC's people to revegetate the Yarrowee Creek.

December. Carol Hall gave a fascinating presentation about her trip to Antarctica and Patagonia - pity it's a bit far for a field trip. "Clarksdale" the Linton bird block was the excursion venue, yielding 37 bird species. The end of the year was enjoyably celebrated at Carol Hall's home with a barbeque lunch. Wet last year, hot this one.

January. A committee meeting was held in Meredith.

February. Paul Norquay spoke about Tree Protection Systems. The excursion to Meredith/Bamganie planned by Lyndsay Fink and led by local Landcare leader Robert McColl was inspiring. Their work - dedication and commitment is marvellous. We met on the 15th to wander over the newly created North Gardens wetland to see how it is progressing. Some birds especially ibis have been quick to settle there.

During the Year we have been busy with other matters. The Regional Forest Agreement for West Victoria was signed on March 31st. We note with some concern that some agreements are

being ignored. We must remain vigilant. We sent a submission to the Environment Conservation Council about Box-Ironbark forests. The GST began and we registered as a tax exempt charity. Our Australian business number is 13150403135.

We plan to publish a small book as a guide to local bushland areas. This will be published to celebrate 50 years as a club. We have applied to various sources for funding assistance with mixed success. We have applied to various sources for funding assistance with mixed success. We have done some work on planning, text and photography. Please help us achieve this. Carol Hall prepared a flyer which we distributed around town with some response. Currently we are following the Creswick Golf Club development with concern, as a private business seeks to acquire crown land, even Regional Park land. We believe we must voice our concerns about this and are hopeful of an acceptable result. It is a good team but special thanks must go to John Gregurke who has been a wonderful secretary and is fortunately staying on. Thankyou too to Bob Curtain who accepted our challenge to mind our money and has done just that. Again thanks to Brian Andrews for making sure the newsletter is always ready and full of interest. Tony Johns deserves mention here for the willing way he has written up so many excursions so capably. Special mention needs to be made of Pat Murphy who is retiring from committee after 30 years of devoted service in many capacities. Pat, your expertise and experience will be greatly missed. Well done.

I trust 2001 will reveal all manner of fascinating natural wonders and that we will enjoy one another's company while we seek them.

Claire Dalman.

FIELD REPORTS...SHOW AND TELL

Brown goshawk, hare walking through flock of white winged choughs, causing bemusement, 25th Feb, John Mildren. // Whistling kite at Bacchus Marsh, 25th Feb, Greg Binns. // Spotted harrier, Corindhap, 25th Feb, Les Hanrahan. // Dingy swallowtail *Papilio anactus* laying eggs on lemon tree, 25th Feb, brown goshawk, 2nd March, Creswick, Ken McDonnell. // Black shouldered kite, NW of Maldon, 18th March and five, S of Streatham, 25th Feb, Belinda Taylor. // Olive whistler, blue winged parrot and satin bower birds, Otway Ranges. Grey butcher birds, Ballarat, 18th Feb, Ken Hammond. // Tawny frogmouth dead on road, Pleasant St near City Oval, 19th Feb, Brian Andrews. // Seed pods of trees from Flindersia and Allocasuarina genera shown by Lyndsay Fink.

TREES

The March meeting was our members night and once again our own members came up with some fine presentations.

Carol Hall with her excellent photography went first with an assortment of slides ranging from vividly coloured wet candlebark trunks, showing red patches (hence 'rubida') to bare black deciduous trees in a snow covered Yorkshire countryside.

Pat Murphy followed with an impressive collection of notable local trees, both native and introduced. Pat had an impressive amount of information. Some of the trees were familiar to us, such as the 'Big Tree' at Guildford, of Burke and Wills fame. I am quite certain though that Pat came up with a lot of treasures that we didn't know about - but we vowed to visit them on future excursions!

John Gregurke was next and he quickly demonstrated his preference for warm climates. He showed slides of mallee vegetation taken on a recent trip to Gluepot Station. The slide of the quandongs aroused special interest, the points were made that they are excellent to eat and they make superb jam!

Genni Binns shared her knowledge of the baobab family which apparently originated in Madagascar, probably arriving in Australia as floating seed. The main emphasis of her talk was on the Australian boab tree, *Adansonia gregorii*, affectionately known as the bottle tree because of its large barrel shaped trunk which acts as a water storage. We were handed specimens of the large nuts to inspect.

Lyndsay Fink informed and entertained with slides of trees seen on his travels throughout Australia. Needless to say Lyndsay had plenty of good stories to go with the slides. He finished with his current favourite - a woolemi pine, at his suggestion one will soon be planted in the Ballarat Botanic Garden.

I showed slides of the Geelong Botanic Gardens and its fine collection of trees. I made comments on what I had seen for example a eucalypt which is now a corymbia (and a diversion to Alice Springs for some ghost gums). Bunya bunya pines with their giant cones (which I found in the Herbarium), I was intrigued to discover that the cones display spirals (5,8), like the northern hemisphere conifers. Several introduced trees which had beautiful flowers were shown, many of us like to grow them - but we shouldn't, should we!

Frank Harrap was lucky last with a video of things that live on trees, but he was unlucky because we couldn't get the video to work. With the audience restless and dying for supper we vowed to see Frank's video another night.

Don't forget that the topic for next years member's night is 'My Favourite Place in Victoria'.
Brian Andrews

V.F.N.C.A. CAMPOUT AND AGM AT RAWSON VILLAGE.

Campout. Over 100 Field Natralists met and enjoyed the week-end organized by the Latrobe Valley FNC. Six members from Ballarat attended.

Rawson Village is a large complex comprising Motel, Lodge and Hostel accommodation. We were in the lodge, the rooms were small but comfortable.

The weather was variable, hot and humid, cool and after returning from one excursion it rained, the precipitation was such that we could almost walk between the drops. The effect of the recent dry weather was seen in the ferns and soft-leaved plants. Many ferns had already died.

there were 15 excursions from which to choose. These covered plants, history, geology, birds, rivers, nature trail and a visit to the garden of botanist Jean Galbraith which had both exotics and natives in a plant filled garden. Among the birds observed were dozens of swifts both fork-tailed and needle-tailed, heralding the change in weather.

Each night after briefing for the following day we listened to guest speakers who were Ken Harris on "Morwell NP" with the aid of a computer, Leon Costermans on the "Relation between Environment and Plant Communities" and Patrick Morgan on "Gippsland Naturalists - an Historical Perspective".

A Great Week-end!

Helen Burgess

AGM During the AGM of the Association Noel Schleiger (Melb) and Aileen Stewart (Sunraysia) were re-elected to the Committee of Management. Some items of relevance to FNCB, from the General Meeting, were: (i) clubs are to be contacted to ascertain opinions on the development of a VFNCA Website. (ii) the FNCB application for an interest free loan to fund the initial publication of the proposed 'Ballarat Bushland Book', was approved.

A motion was passed to allow individuals, who do not have the opportunity to become a member of a field naturalist club in Victoria, to become Individual Members. They will receive information for the two campout gatherings each year, and the membership subscription will be \$5.

The camp out programme venues proposed for the next two years are :

2002 - Bacchus Marsh and Ballarat,

2003 - Melbourne Central and Portland.

Greg Binns

EXCURSION: BALLARAT - SKIPTON RAIL TRAIL.



R. laciniatus subsp. *laciniatus*

Twelve members attended our excursion along parts of the now unused Ballarat to Skipton rail line. After an unscheduled stop at Smythesdale for a breaathalyser test we arrived at our first stop. This was near Scarsdale where we inspected the large wooden trestle rail bridge which spanned the Woady Yaloak River. Nimon's Bridge is one of the largest timber trestle bridges in Victoria. This bridge was about 13 metres above the river at the valleys deepest part. There was some discussion about the source of the long straight logs that were used in the bridges construction.

Next stop was near Devil's Kitchen where we saw a Peregrine Falcon circling overhead. A black wallaby was briefly seen before it disappeared behind some bushes.

After travelling along Golden Lake Road we rejoined the rail trail. This road was named after one of the gold mines that was in the area. The trail here runs through timbered country. The trees included black wattle and red stringybark. We walked along the trail which after a while ran through a long cutting to a now unusable overhead road bridge. Brian Andrews showed us a grass tree whose flower spike was twisted into four loops. Grasses noticed included kangaroo and wallaby grass and one of the *Poa* species that grew in attractive clumps. Kevin Andrews found a large golden orb-weaving spider *Nephila edulis* resting in the centre of its web. This spider was about 100 millimetres across its outstretched legs. When the spider's web was looked at from a certain angle it showed a golden tint. Other spiders seen included a leaf curling spider and a christmas spider *Gasteracantha minax*. The christmas spider's abdomen was black with yellow spots and its legs were orange. Yellow-faced and white-naped honeyeaters, a yellow robin and a spotted pardalote were seen near the overhead bridge. A bracket fungus, the rainbow fungus *Trametes versicolor*, with tiny pores on the underside was growing on a log on the ground. A cork-screw fern was growing on the sloping embankment of the cutting. A *Correa reflexa* plant was just starting to flower.

After lunch at Edinborough Reserve in Linton we drove to

Linton Reservoir. Blue gums, *Pinus radiata* and oak trees have been planted near the reservoir. The European Blackberry, that has dissected leaves (see above) and larger berries than the usual blackberries with entire leaves, was growing at the side of the railway embankment. Caterpillars were seen on a drooping mistletoe that was growing on a blackwood. These caterpillars were the larvae of the mistletoe loving wood white butterfly.

The last stop on the rail trail for the day was near the Glenelg Highway about six kilometres from Skipton. This area had some plants that are found in native grassland. Ones that were flowering despite the recent dry summer included poison lobelia, blue devils, pink bindweed, lemon and milky beauty-heads. Phalaris grass is starting to encroach on this strip. It is hoped that it can be controlled before it smothers the native vegetation.

Thanks to Pat and Bill Murphy who provided valuable help in planning the excursion and to Brian Andrews for leading it.
Les Hanrahan

AN EVENING IN THE WOMBAT

We were all keen to go and we almost went without Greg and Belinda who arrived a minute late!

First stop was at Spargo Creek Mineral Springs Reserve. This area has been "beautified" in the past, and as we drove in, the autumn yellow of the introduced deciduous trees struck me as attractive, and I wondered about the identity of some of the conifers. However it didn't take long for the natives to dominate our attention. Ken McDonnell commented on the majesty of the tall manna gums on the adjacent hillside and asked what I thought a large tree near the creek was, I came up with some suggestions which were way off target, but Belinda saved the day by pointing out that since the edges of the leaves were wavy, it was either a swamp gum or the closely related yarra gum, we settled for a swamp gum - but it was big, I estimated that the trunk was over 1m diameter about 1m from the ground. I'll have a closer look next time that I go back for some spa-water. At this stage all the others were heading down the track towards the spring, so we quickly followed. Most agreed that the water tasted terrible on its own but a little cordial turned it into a very pleasant drink. A group of birds drinking and bathing in a clear spot in the creek attracted our attention, there was a family of fantails, several blue wrens, white browed scrub wrens and probably others. Refreshed and with bottles filled we wandered back to the cars and set off for the Werribee River Picnic Ground.

Arriving at the picnic ground we were favourably impressed by new, clean tables and the immaculately maintained surroundings - in a beautiful forest setting. We headed off for a reconnoitre before tea. We decided to investigate the loop track adjacent to the picnic ground. Those with plenty of energy headed off up the steep steps, getting a magnificent view of the fern lined river below - which due to the dry weather is now just a series of pools. On the side of the track was some heathy scrub, inspection showed that it had small white flowers starting to open up and a closer look revealed it to be beard heath. Further along was an ant mound, looking to see what type they were, the blue-black bodies and orange feelers alerted me to the fact the fact that they were jumping jacks, which can be very aggressive and have a rather painful bite. However curiosity overcame fear and I spent a while looking at their mound. It was smaller than that of the meat ants, which often have mounds about 3m across, meat ants also seem to take pride in topping their mounds with fine pebbles, quartz in our area. By contrast the jumpers not only had pebbles but also a collection of twigs all about 15mm long. Curiosity satisfied I moved on, thankful that I had not been bitten. I was surprised that no one else had noticed the mound and with all the people passing by the ants were probably getting stirred up, so it was surprising that nobody was bitten. We noted the position of some good looking trees with hollows for our afterdark ramble.

It was then time for tea, but recalling that the greater gliders which I had seen before were in trees near a creek I wandered across the road and found a couple of great old trees with hollows. The trees were on top of a rise, overlooking the river valley. A perfect home and launching place for greater gliders, the animals which we most hoped to see. They are spectacular animals almost a metre long and they can glide for about 100m. According to Menkhorst, Mt Doran is the western extremity of their range, but it would seem that there are no reports from there for at least 30 years, by contrast there seem to be several recent reports (1970 onwards) from the Wombat, apparently mostly along the Lerderderg River. We will be going there on our June excursion - but that will be in daylight and we will be mainly looking for fungi. A few interesting points are made by Menkhorst :- luckily there are quite a few in reserves in the east of the state. However they do require old trees with good hollows for denning and they also prefer to live in areas of good rainfall and good soil - which also produces good trees, favoured by the timber industry. They are also preyed on by powerful owls.

During tea we discussed the birds which were plentiful but mostly high up in the trees, Greg mentioned brown headed honeyeaters etc. A group of screeching black cockatoos flew overhead and several white cockatoos flew around screeching even louder. Joan Riddel was startled when she realized things were dropping into her tea - we soon worked out what was happening, high in the tree above a crimson rosella was eating eucalypt seed and dropping the seed pods onto us below!

After tea we headed off, torches in hand, reaching the trees that I had picked we waited and hoped. We sat amongst the tussock grass and for a while just enjoyed the peace and beauty of the bush and each others company. As darkness approached bats flew nearby, we could hear the squeaks of some but not others. John Gregurke speculated that they were chocolate wattled bats and white-striped mastiff-bats (also known as white-striped freetail bats). One has a sonar squeaks with frequency down to 15khz, audible to most people but the other has squeaks of a much higher frequency and therefore inaudible to most if not all people. Unfortunately I can't remember which he said was which and I couldn't find reference to the fact in the books I had. We waited for quite a while, just about dark, their normal time of emergence, and a bit longer but with the mozzies getting fierce we decided to move on. Another five minutes might have done the trick or maybe they were just waiting for us to leave but most likely Andrews just picked the wrong spot!

With renewed hope the group headed for the areas with the trees that everybody else had picked out. Les Hanrahan soon spotted something, it turned out to be a family of kookaburras, mum, dad and junior snuggled up in the middle. I know he have all seen kookaburras but in the light of the torches, in the still of a dark night in the middle of the forest they seemed to have an unusual beauty, having had a look, we moved on, leaving them in peace. We continued the search, I became excited when I saw two quite large green eyes, but they seemed to come and go and nobody else could see them, eventually Ken offered to hold my spotlight while I looked through his binoculars, I thought that would enable me to see what it was, but when I looked there was nothing there! Stunned I decided to look closer, and the spot, the end of a broken branch had a hollow, and no doubt what ever it was had taken refuge in the hollow. Kevin then took the lead and spotted the bright yellow eyes of a koala, which Greg Identified as a female. Further on light orange eyes gave away the presence of a tawny frogmouth. Soon after we realized the time was 10pm and with most people having commitments the next day we decided to head back to Ballarat.

But we went back through the forest section at a leisurely pace, spotlights out the windows. Luckily we weren't spotted, stopped and interrogated by the police because they would probably have thought we were shooting, and that I'm quite sure is illegal from the road! However the Gregurke car spotted two foxes and we caught a glimpse of something brownish, about 20cm long fluttering across the road, just before a clearing - I could think of only one explanation - an owllet nightjar.

Brian Andrews

MARCH POSER...NATURAL JOKES

J1. Why did the baby snake ask its mother if they were a poisonous species?...It had just bit its tongue! (Helen Burgess) J2. Why did the psychiatrist keep his wife under the bed?...He thought she was a little potty! (Tony Johns) J3. What do you call a deer with no eyes?... No idea. (Helen Burgess) J4. Why are echidnas so healthy?...They are full of antibodies! (Lyndsay Fink) J5. Why was Ken McDonnell so keen to drink the radioactive springwater at Lyonville?...He wanted to put some sparkle into his life! (Ken McDonnell himself) J6. Why are days longer in the summer?...Everything expands in the heat! (Peter Dalman)

BDA

APRIL POSER...QUICKIE QUIZ

1. What is the floral emblem of the ACT?
2. Which gem has a 90% Australian production?
3. How many kangaroos on the \$1 coin?
4. Used jokingly by boxers, is the name 'canvas back', but what is a canvas back?
5. From which language comes the word apartheid?
6. Asbestos was mined near which town?
7. Which Australian marsupial is blind?
8. Where would members of the Sirena family live?

Elfin

Rubus laciniatus.... from Flora of Victoria

-----***----- FNCB -----***-----

Meetings are held at the Ballarat Horticulture Centre, corner of Gregory and Gillies Streets, ie. the NW corner of the Botanic Gardens, VICROADS 254 F8, commencing at 7-30pm

Excursions depart from Creswick Plaza, VICROADS 255 M10, at 9-30 am, unless specified otherwise.

Committee; Brian Andrews (President)..5341 3269, Greg Binns (Vice President)..5333 2282, John Gregurke (Secretary)..5339 4993 jgregurke@giant.net.au , Bob Curtain (Treasurer)..5332 3780, Carol Hall (Editor)..5339 2255 chall@netconnect.com.au , Helen Burgess, Maureen Christie, Claire Dalman, Lyndsay Fink, Les Hanrahan, John Mildren, Gail Whyte.

Postal Address: PO Box 328W, Ballarat West, 3350

Inc Reg No A0014919P